



An Inquiry into:
“The Adventure of the Illustrrious Client”

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“The Adventure of the Illustrrious Client” was first published in *Collier’s Weekly Magazine* on November 8, 1924. It ran *The Strand Magazine* on February/March 1925. It is part of *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*.

As the table shows, thanks to Watson’s clear dating, none of our chronologists dispute the year in which this case took place. That being so, then at the time

of our chronologists dispute the year in which this case took place. That being so, then at the time Sherlock Holmes was 48 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 50.

Main Characters:

Colonel Sir James Damery, discreet high society go-between who tactfully smoothes out delicate problems, now acting in behalf of an anonymous, possibly Royal, client. Baron Adelbert Gruner, infamous Austrian nobleman, suspected murderer, and sadistic womanizer. Violet de Merville, Baron Gruner’s fiancée and next victim. Shinwell Johnson, former criminal and Holmes’ spy in the London underworld. Kitty Winter, former mistress and victim of Gruner’s. Sir Leslie Oakshott, surgeon.

Notable Quotes:

“It can’t hurt now,” was Mr. Sherlock Holmes’s comment when, for the tenth time in as many years, I asked his leave to reveal the following narrative. So it was that at last I obtained permission to put on record what was, in some ways, the supreme moment of my friend’s career.

“Woman’s heart and mind are insoluble puzzles to the male. Murder might be condoned or explained, and yet some smaller offence might rankle.”

Some people’s affability is more deadly than the violence of coarser souls.

You may have noticed how extremes call to each other, the spiritual to the animal, the cave-man to the angel.

<i>The Adventure of the Illustrrious Client</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	Wednesday, September 3, 1902
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Wednesday, September 3, 1902</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Saturday, September 13, 1902</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>Wednesday, September 3, 1902</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>September 1902</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Wednesday, September 3, 1902</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Wednesday, September 3, 1902</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Friday, October 3, 1902</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>October 3, 1902</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Wednesday September 3rd 1902</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	1902
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Saturday, September 13, 1902</i>

Please note that Canon chronologists may differ on pivotal dates and comparative periods between cases, thus a simple majority is not necessarily correct. Most Canon scholars settle on a single chronologist’s results for their research framework.

There was a curious secretive streak in the man which led to many dramatic effects, but left even his closest friend guessing as to what his exact plans might be. He pushed to an extreme the axiom that the only safe plotter was he who plotted alone. I was nearer him than anyone else, and yet I was always conscious of the gap between.

The same paper had the first police-court hearing of the proceedings against Miss Kitty Winter on the grave charge of vitriol-throwing. Such extenuating circumstances came out in the trial that the sentence, as will be remembered, was the lowest that was possible for such an offence. Sherlock Holmes was threatened with a prosecution for burglary, but when an object is good and a client is sufficiently illustrious, even the rigid British law becomes human and elastic. My friend has not yet stood in the dock.

The Illustrious Clientele

As in BERY, we once more witness the appearance of a mysterious personage whose identity we might doubt, given the fact of Doctor Watson's legendary discretion. He may have disguised the visitor's true identity by placing over him the incognito mantle of "Colonel Sir James Damery." Perhaps there really was not such person as Sir James, and the illustrious client might have been a member of the Royal Family, possibly even King Edward VII himself, using Damery as a *nom de guerre*.



King Edward VII

My dictionary defines "illustrious" as "extremely distinguished and deservedly famous." One would think that this adjective applied more to His Imperial Majesty than to a social go-between of low noble rank, regardless of how useful he was to the higher spheres of society.

As a mere knight, Sir James would have only been first-generation nobility; knighthood grants nobility, and at the instant of his dubbing the new knight goes from being a commoner to being noble. However, knighthood is earned, not inherited, and it ends with the holder's death, so it is safe to assume that Sir James had been a commoner.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

If Damery had really wished to keep his visit to 221B Baker Street confidential, why would he have used a carriage decorated with respected "armorial bearings upon the panel"? Surely someone occupying a position of such delicacy in the social sphere would have had his own nondescript carriage—without armorial bearings—or would have taken a cab. Perhaps this was a literary device used by Watson to move us to further speculate upon the illustrious visitor's real identity, without actually revealing who he really was.

Also informative is Holmes' protestation to Sir James that, "I am accustomed to have mystery at one end of my case, but to have it at both ends is too confusing." Yet, he easily yielded to the situation, a very atypical reaction considering that he thought such condition to be so unacceptable that it disposed him to refuse a case, as Lord Bellinger and Mr. Trelawney Hope found out in SECO.

Watson absurdly tells us that this “was, in some ways, the supreme moment” of Holmes’ career. In other words, our biographer ranks this case above the importance of others that one would think were of much greater import, such as BRUC, NAVA, SECO and others. Why? It could not have been just because Holmes rendered—at the risk of his life—an enormous service to the unspeakably and



Courtesy of ITV Granada

intolerably stupid Miss Violet de Merville by preventing her from wedding a murderer. This case in no way seems to approach the same importance of the others mentioned.

In the greater scheme of things, Violet de Merville was nobody. I have mentioned before that research I did into this matter convinced me that Holmes did indeed save a woman for whom King Edward VII had a powerful emotional attachment: his daughter, Princess Victoria Alexandra Olga Mary. She was his fourth child and second daughter, the younger sister of the future George V. If these were indeed the facts, then Holmes most definitely did shine by preventing what at best would have been a considerable

scandal and source of grief for the King-Emperor’s family. It is interesting to note that Princess Victoria never married.

If she was “Violet de Merville” then the case assumes a completely different magnitude, and Watson’s seemingly exaggerated evaluation of this having been Holmes’ “supreme moment” would better fit the facts.

It would also explain why Miss de Merville—with the influence of the Illustrious Client—wasn’t simply spirited to a private institution as a patient suffering from one of the many “hysterical” disorders which, along with tight corsets that did not allow them to breathe well, proper young ladies of the time often had to endure. Absence does not necessarily make the heart grow fonder and, regardless of what is generally believed, post-hypnotic suggestions do not last long without being reinforced. A few months under restraint might have turned the trick.

An Easily Resolved Problem

If one considers this case dispassionately, it must be concluded that although Holmes did his best, the matter was finally brought to a satisfactory conclusion not by Holmes, but by Kitty Winter.

If we are to believe that the foolish Miss de Merville was so profoundly under Gruner’s romantic (and hypnotic) sway, having her read his “Lust Book” would have had little effect. The lady had reached a point at which she utterly lacked a moral compass, and a simple protestation by Gruner that the book was a fake would have seemed plausible to her. One must recall that she had already “forgiven” him for a great many things that took place in his past, including a possible murder. Kitty’s well-aimed squirt of vitriol played a major part in abolishing that possible situation.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

In fact, in view of the circumstances, one might even suspect that it is not unlikely that Holmes took Kitty with him to the Baron's house knowing that such an attempt was more than possible. There was no need for her to be there; after all, she had already told our sleuth where Gruner kept the lust book he was after. If Gruner had changed the book's hiding place after Kitty left, she would have been of no use.

Kitty, moved by her indescribable hatred of Gruner was unpredictable. Clearly, she could have endangered Holmes' mission. This is why I harbor the suspicion that our sleuth deduced that she would attack Gruner in some way, possibly with a revolver or a dagger bringing the situation to its only possible solution. Let us recall that he noticed that she was carrying a small package that she was carrying, and did not query her about it.

An equally mystifying question is why even bring Holmes into the matter. It would have posed no problem for the Illustrious Client or some of coterie, to arrange an unfortunate "accident" for the baron. This would immediately have solved the problem, with the added advantage that even if there were suspicion of foul play, nobody would have bothered to dig too deeply into the circumstances that led to the death of such an unsavory foreigner.

What else happened in 1902:

Empire

First celebration of Empire Day (renamed "Commonwealth Day" in 1959).

Joseph Chamberlain advocates return to Protection and Imperial Preference.

Anglo-German fleet seizes Venezuelan fleet to recover debts and reparations.

Peace of Vereeniging, ends Boer War.

Britain



Anglo-Japanese Treaty for mutual defense and to maintain status quo in Far East.

Sir Giles Gilbert Scott designs Liverpool Cathedral.

Institution of the Order of Merit for distinguished service to the state; limited to 24 holders at one time.

◀ Salisbury resigns, succeeded as PM by Arthur Balfour.

Education Act abolishes School Board system. Local control goes to town and county councils.

Secondary Education authorized out of rates.

British Academy granted Royal Charter.

Esperanto introduced to England.

Establishment of Metropolitan Water Board, supplying London.

Arthur Conan Doyle is knighted.

World

Franco-Italian secret treaty; Italy to remain neutral if France were attacked by a third power.

Failure of second Belgian General Strike.

Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria, and Italy) renewed to 1914.

Italian designs on Tripoli conditionally approved by France and Austria.



F.A. Krupp takes over Germania shipbuilding yard at Kiel; great armaments firm develops.

Russo-Japanese Convention, Russia agrees to evacuate Manchuria in 18 months.

French work day reduced to 9½ hours.

◀ Abdul Hamid gives Germany concessions to build railway to Baghdad; rail system to stretch from Hamburg to the Persian Gulf.

Public Health Act in France improves artisan living conditions.

White settlement of Kenya begins.

St. Pierre, Martinique, destroyed by earthquake.

Tientsin Sanitary Police established; first Chinese public health measure.

Art

Conan Doyle publishes *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

Kipling publishes *Just So Stories*.

Arthur Edward Woodley Mason publishes *The Four Feathers*.

Beatrix Potter publishes *Peter Rabbit*.

Enrico Caruso makes his first gramophone record—154 recordings in all.

Gauguin paints *The Call*.

Debussy composes *Pelléas et Mélisandé*.

Picasso paints *Nude, Back View*.

Elgar composes *Coronation Ode*.

Science and Technology

Wireless telegraphy applied to ships.

Trans-Pacific Cable laid.

Completion of Aswan Dam in Egypt.

Next week's case: 3GAB

Respectfully submitted,

Murray, the Courageous Orderly

(a.k.a. Alexander E. Braun)

"I should have fallen into the hands of the murderous Ghazis had it not been for the devotion and courage shown by Murray, my orderly..."

If you would like to join the Hounds of the Internet, email us at CourageousMurray@aol.com.